

Are You and Your Students Bored With the Benchmarks? Sinking Under the Standards?



*Then Transform
Your Teaching
Through Transition!*

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Benchmarks and standards have become an important part of our instructional focus since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As educators we all recognize the importance of having high expectations of our students. Standards help schools articulate these expectations clearly to students, their parents, and the community. Yet, there are some substantial difficulties in using standards for instructional planning. Also, the use of standards does not ensure that teaching is engaging and effective. A means for solving some of these concerns is to incorporate transition needs with standards-based instruction. Transition can be a vehicle for incorporating research-based instructional practices that utilize authentic problem-based learning that is motivating, engaging, and effective (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2005; Institute of Educational Sciences [IES], 1999, 2003; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002; Valverde & Schmidt, 1997–1998).

Challenges in Developing Standards-Based Instruction

One of the difficulties in designing standards-based instruction is that many standards are quite broad and vague (Patton & Trainor, 2002; Popham, 2001,

2004; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Some have an implied or ambiguous central concept, with several potential interpretations of important core content. Other standards have a clear central or focal concept, but imply multiple cognitive processes or skills that students need to acquire in order to demonstrate this learning. Some standards are very specific and focus on narrow lists of facts or skills to be learned. Combining both broad and narrow standards into related instructional lessons can be very challenging.

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The following is an example of a fifth-grade mathematics standard from the Ohio Department of Education. The specific (perhaps assumed) “standard language” to describe these mathematical concepts is not clear, nor is the depth of description apparent (theoreti-

cal or mathematical vs. concrete or applied).

Fifth Grade Mathematics: Geometry and Spatial Sense Standard

2. Use standard language to describe line, segment, ray, angle, skew, parallel, and perpendicular.

Another problem facing teachers is that lists of standards have been developed to be comprehensive, typically by experts in the field. However, the consequence is an overwhelming list of far too many standards than can be taught effectively (Popham, 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). For example, the Ohio Department of Education’s fifth-grade social studies curriculum includes 44 separate standards, with 11 of these standards including multiple parts (ranging from three to seven items). In a 36-week school year, that divides out to roughly 1 new standard every 4 days, progress that is much too rapid for students to learn entirely new concepts and principles.

In comparison with other countries, the United States focuses much more on wide instructional coverage, but with lit-

Table 1. Annotated List of Several State IEP and Transition Resources**Alabama Department of Education**

<http://www.alsde.edu/html/sections/documents.asp?section=65&sort=5&footer=sections>

Information on transition events, career pathways documents, and using content curricula with special education students.

Colorado Department of Education

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/StuDis-Sub1.asp>

Links to resource materials to help IEP teams use content standards.

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/FF-IEPstnds.pdf>

Overview with rationale and developmental sequence for standards-driven IEP goals.

South Dakota Department of Education

<http://doe.sd.gov/oess/specialed/IEP/docs/IEPslinkedtoContentStandards.ppt>

PowerPoint description of the rationale and steps for linking standards to IEPs.

Virginia Department of Education

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sped/iep/presentation-sept-05.ppt>

PowerPoint presentation describing a process for linking standards and IEPs.

West Virginia Department of Education

<http://wvde.state.wv.us/ose/StandardsBasedIEPs.pdf>

Technical brief on connecting content standards to IEP development.

tle depth, to the detriment of science and math scores (IES, 1999, 2003; Valverde & Schmidt, 1997–1998). Our textbooks are much thicker in comparison with several other high-performing countries. These high-performing countries use a problem-solving and critical-thinking approach. However, our thick textbooks leave far too little instructional time for higher-order thinking-skills approaches and for application or use of the content (IES; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Testing pressures to cover all grade-level standards, without sufficient instructional time to build retention or generalization is not good instruction, even if it is standards-based.

The problem-solving and critical-thinking approaches used by more successful countries develop important life-long skills, in addition to enhancing basic content retention. Good instruction should be authentic and relevant to the students' lives by addressing skills, knowledge, and content that they will need later. This increases their motivation as well as their retention—we all pay more attention to, and are more engaged in, learning things we believe will be important to us later (Freiberg &

Driscoll, 2005; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002).

Incorporating Transition

One way to be sure that our instruction is relevant to students' lives is by incorporating their transition needs and adult-living issues into our classroom teaching. Transition, by definition, addresses the interests, needs, and preferences of the students—it is about “them” so it is likely that our students will be engaged in these topics. Presenting these issues as “problems” to be solved also heightens engagement and teaches them critical higher-order thinking skills (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Transition also can help teachers make critical choices among standards. We need to prioritize the students' instructional needs; therefore, selecting those with clear lifelong applicability and value is an important criterion to use (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Your students' most apparent and enduring transition needs provide a selection rubric to use.

When reviewing students' transition needs, it can be helpful to have a comprehensive listing of transition skills.

Some of the state transition planning forms are not very specific. A comprehensive listing of specific skills is Brolin's (1997) Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) competencies. He identifies 97 transition competencies that are divided into three domains: Daily Living Skills, Personal-Social Skills, and Occupation Guidance and Preparation.

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Once you have identified and prioritized your students' range of transition needs, it is time to integrate these with the state curriculum standards. Use the transition needs to select those standards that also reflect the students' greatest lifelong needs. The next step is to integrate transition needs into the instructional activities that meet the

benchmarks for the standards. A number of states provide information to help teachers link state standards with transition. Some of the state sites are listed in Table 1.

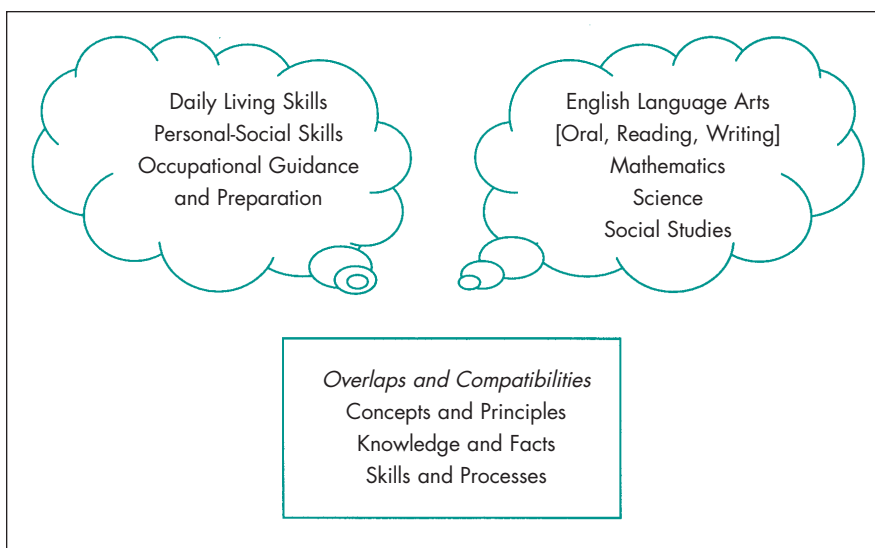
It still can be difficult to parse vague and broad standards into separate knowledge and skills, concepts, and thinking processes that students will need. Special educators who are trained in doing task analyses have an advantage over general educators who may be less practiced at this type of analysis. Nevertheless, implied and ambiguous skills or processes are not easy to analyze. District or state Web sites or curriculum resource personnel may be of help in this process.

A Recommended Process

The steps for integrating state standards with transition needs use a mixture of divergent and convergent thinking processes. Divergent thinking (such as brainstorming) frees up our creative skills to develop engaging instruction, and the convergent thinking evaluates these ideas so that they are effective in meeting student and instructional needs. An example of this prioritizing and integrating process is described in the following.

1. Identify and prioritize your students' transition needs according to lifelong importance and value; identify how they fit within the larger LCCE competencies to help organize and prioritize within transition domains (or use your state transition plan's categories).
2. Use the transition needs to identify and prioritize relevant content standards according to lifelong importance and value.
3. Develop a listing or use a Venn Diagram for identified transition needs and content standards; use divergent thinking to identify areas of overlap or compatibility for different types of learning: concepts and principles, knowledge and facts, skills and processes (See Figure 1).
4. If there are few or limited areas of overlap, then repeat steps 1 and 2 to broaden the possibilities—use broader divergent thinking strategies and

Figure 1. Incorporating Transition Priorities With Standards



brainstorming processes, or ask a colleague or support person for ideas.

5. Use convergent thinking to evaluate the overlapped and compatible ideas to narrow and refine according to:
 - (a) Student academic and transition needs.
 - (b) Suitability for effective instructional planning and teaching; make your final teaching selection and organization and planning processes.

When learning a new skill, it is always helpful to see some examples. A set of generic examples are available on the Web for Grades 5 and 10 of the Ohio Department of Education academic curriculum (<http://www.educ.kent.edu/fundedprojects/TSPT/priorities/priorities.htm>, look under "Priority 3: Competency in Functional Academics"). These integrate each of the four academic content area standards—English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies—with transition-focused teaching activities for each of the three LCCE domains: Daily Living Skills, Personal Social Skills, and Occupational Guidance and Preparation. Each academic content standard has at least one instructional activity for each of the three LCCE transition competency domains. Some examples are shown in Table 2 (for fifth-grade stan-

dards) and Table 3 (for tenth-grade standards).

The Ohio Department of Education Standards (Ohio Department of Education Academic Standards, 2005) are typical of many state standards and are based on recommendations from learned societies (e.g., National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Teachers Association; cf. Ohio Department of Education, 2001). We chose standards at the fifth-grade level as representing the academic functioning of many special education students and students who are deaf/hard of hearing. We also selected the tenth-grade standards to demonstrate how transition applies equally effectively to college-bound and high achieving students' instruction—all students need to understand the lifelong uses of their content knowledge!

Collaborating With Others

As teachers we work with a variety of related service personnel such as speech and language specialists, occupational and physical therapists, and others. Their perspectives on key transition needs of our students and ideas regarding related academic standards can help us be sure we are comprehensive and thorough. Including the parents' and students' perspectives from the annual IEP's vision statement is another important tool to help us build toward agreed-on lifelong outcomes. Parents, students,

Table 2. Examples of Fifth-Grade Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Standards and Transition-Focused Instructional Activities

ODE Curriculum Standard	Daily Living Skills	Personal-Social Skills	Occupational Guidance and Preparation
English Language Arts—Reading Process: Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies, and Self-Monitoring Strategies Standard Make inferences based on implicit information in texts, and provide justifications for those inferences.	Use housing descriptions, vacation descriptions, friendship or relationship descriptions, and interpret how each would or would not match well with your own personality.	Read “Dear Abby” or help columns with letters. Interpret the problem described in terms of explicit vs. implicit information. Evaluate how the response used this information.	Use job/workplace descriptions and requirements to compare with one’s own personality characteristics. Interpret how each would or would not match well with your own personality.
Geometry and Spatial Sense Standard Use standard language to describe line, segment, ray, angle, skew, parallel, and perpendicular.	Identify the best seating in classrooms, auditoriums, meeting rooms for persons who are deaf/hard of hearing according to sightlines (rays, line segments) and parallel vs. perpendicular seating.	Students describe to each other different geometric figures found in their homes, school, etc. Give directions to a classmate using geometric terms—do they reach the correct destination?	Examine a diagram of your city developed by city planners for traffic flow, pedestrians, green space, etc.
Life Sciences: Diversity and Interdependence of Life Standard Support how an organism’s patterns of behavior are related to the nature of that organism’s ecosystem, including the kinds and numbers of other organisms present, the availability of food and resources, and the changing physical characteristics of the ecosystem.	Have students discuss the characteristics of their own environment as urban, suburban, or rural. Have them discuss the characteristics in terms of population and availability of services and resources. Have each identify their preferences and explain why.	Students will talk with older people from their area. They will have them describe changes in the ecosystem and the environment and how this has changed their behavior. Students will e-mail a student from another ecosystem and/or culture and compare their behaviors (clothing, food, daily schedule, etc.). The class will identify environmental characteristics that influence culture and behavior.	Have a civil engineer or urban planner present how the area manages and addresses the needs of the local population. Hold a discussion about what types of jobs and businesses became available before and since the students were born. Identify how expansion of businesses has changed habitats.
Geography Standard: Places and Regions Explain how climate is influenced by Earth-sun relationships, landforms, and vegetation.	Examine the impact of these climatic issues on housing and recreation.	Examine the impact of these climatic issues on personal choice and preferences (4 seasons vs. warm year round, mountains vs. flat, etc.).	Students examine meteorology and other professions pertaining to climates, landforms, and vegetation. Examine the impact of these climatic issues on jobs (e.g., landforms affect mining, tourism leads to regulation, forests are looked at for timber, etc.).

Table 3. Examples of Tenth-Grade Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Standards and Transition-Focused Instructional Activities

ODE Curriculum Standard	Daily Living Skills	Personal-Social Skills	Occupational Guidance and Preparation
English Language Arts—Grammar and Usage Daily Living Skills Use clauses (e.g., main, subordinate) and phrases (e.g., gerund, infinitive, participle).	Have the students write a request for an accommodation (e.g., fire and alerting devices) that they need at their apartment.	Have students write about a problem they encountered in their life and the causes, effects, possible solutions, and what they have tried so far (self-esteem, self-confidence, self-awareness, D/HH identity, etc.).	Have the students write a proposal explaining why they deserve a raise or a promotion OR have students describe strategies they will use to encourage positive relations with co-workers.
Mathematics: Computation and Estimation Use factorial notation and computations to represent and solve problem situations involving arrangements.	<p>Have students create a password needed for an alarm system. Review their work and use it to explain the difference in using 2 digits vs. 4 digits. With their password have them create all possible combinations. Talk about using phone #'s, birth dates, etc.</p> <p>The students could pretend that they are installing an alarm system in their house and need to pick a password (make sure that students do not tell passwords that they are currently using). Students should not write out every possible combination but use factorial notation to find out how many possible combinations there are.</p> <p>Students could bring locks from home or look at safes located in their homes. They will note how many numbers are on the dial and how many numbers are needed to open the lock. They will use factorial notation to find out how many possible combinations there are for this lock. They will discuss which locks or safes are the safest.</p>	<p>Using their password, have students list positive and negative consequences of using that password—short codes are easy to remember but easier to guess; longer codes are easy to forget, but harder to guess. Discuss the issues involved when using phone numbers, birthdays, etc. Students can discuss how the information that is easy for them to remember is easier for other people to figure out.</p> <p>Compute the probability of multiple choice tests (“blind answering”) for getting all of 20, 50, etc. correct.</p>	<p>How to maintain professionalism on a budget (e.g., an inexpensive professional wardrobe). Have students think of 3 nice shirts, 4 pants, and 2 pairs of shoes. Have students list how many outfits they can form by changing one or more items. Students could be asked to look at their wardrobe at home and pick out professional clothes (shirts, pants/skirts, shoes, ties, etc). They will choose 3 or 4 of these items and figure out how many different combinations of outfits they have.</p> <p>Consider the occupation of a landscaper. Students create different patterns to decorate around a house using a pre-selected number of flowers and trees. Experiment with different mixtures of colors and heights to see the number of combinations that can be created. Have students remove one flower from the selection and see how that impacts the number of combinations that are possible.</p>
			<i>continues</i>

Table 3. *Continued*

ODE Curriculum Standard	Daily Living Skills	Personal-Social Skills	Occupational Guidance and Preparation
Science: Science and Technology—Understanding Technology Cite examples of ways that scientific inquiry is driven by the desire to understand the natural world and how technology is driven by the need to meet human needs and solve problems.	Students will make a list of items in their home that have been invented to make their lives easier. Have the students think of a need that technology has not yet met and create an idea to meet this need.	Students will discuss technology that has been invented to make life easier for deaf and other individuals with special needs (e.g., flashing lights for doorbells and fire alarms, hearing aides, cochlear implants, FM systems, etc.). Students identify which devices they will need as adults.	Students make a list of technologies they use at a job where they are working or volunteering. They identify devices that would be useful at this job site. Students identify technology and accommodations they will need to use at work, as well as when and how they would use each device.
Social Studies/History—Industrialization Explain the effects of industrialization in the United States in the 19th century including: a. Changes in work and the workplace. b. Immigration and child labor and their impact on the labor force. c. Modernization of agriculture. d. Urbanization. e. The emergence of a middle class and the impact it has had on leisure, art, music, literature, and other aspects of culture.	Have students make a list of things they use to prepare food, use for personal hygiene, and other everyday items. Engage students in discussion about what was and wasn't available in the 19th century. Have them do role-plays or create dioramas that indicate key impacts.	Examine aspects of social class and standing and how different social classes treated each other during the 19th century. Discuss if social habits have changed since then and decide if they are positive or negative. The majority of people who are deaf/have disabilities fall in which social class? How did industrialization in the 19th century affect the disability communities (urbanization led to centralization and increased social groups and services)?	To show how workplaces have changed since the industrial revolution, set up a scenario in which students experience the low pay, poor working conditions, and the overall lifestyle. Have students discuss if any of these conditions are still apparent within the deaf and/or the urban workforce.

and school personnel may appreciate the opportunity for input in prioritizing from among transition issues when we design our instruction.

Special educators also work increasingly in itinerant, collaborative, and co-teaching positions with general educators (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004). General educators face the same difficulties in designing effective standards-based instruction. They may appreciate the opportunity to work collaboratively in planning instruction that is authentic, motivating, and engaging, and to learn how to use transition needs as a means for accomplishing this.

An example of integrating transition with academic standards is shown in Table 4. From the list of 50 states we chose the standards from the middle—in this case number 25, Missouri. To demonstrate how applicable transition is across all students, we chose Grade 2 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004). In fact, children ages 6 to 10 years often are interested in developing a sense of “success” at school and for their future (Mooney, 2000). Even though their ideas for work may not be entirely realistic, they have a strong interest in thinking about their future and what they would like to “be”—transition begins much earlier than ages 14 or 16!

The LCCE list of transition competencies was designed to be used across the K to 12 continuum (Brolin, 1997) and include key issues appropriate for second graders:

- *Home and Family*: Doing chores and contributing to family life, setting purchasing priorities and budgets.
- *Self-Care*: Basic hygiene, clothing, purchasing, and cooking skills.
- *Community*: Utilizing resources and recreation, using transportation, and locating key sites.
- *Self-Awareness*: Developing sense of self, self-confidence, social and friendship skills, communication and

Table 4. Example of Integrating LCCE Transition Activities With Missouri Second-Grade State Standards

Integration Process	Second-Grade Application
Step 1: Identify and prioritize your students' transition needs according to lifelong importance and value.	<i>LCCE needs:</i> Self-awareness of skills, interests, and abilities that can lead to a successful future; family and community living, interpersonal skills and preferences.
Step 2: Use the transition needs to identify and prioritize relevant content standards according to lifelong importance and value.	<i>Communication Arts:</i> Predicting and confirming, main idea, text features, graphic organizers, conventions of text. <i>Math:</i> Models, numbers, developmental change. <i>Social Studies:</i> Majority rule, rights, trade and bartering, local landforms. <i>Science:</i> Physical properties, classifying objects, force and motion, life cycles, observing changes.
Step 3: Develop a listing or use a Venn Diagram for identified transition needs and content standards.	<i>Communication Arts:</i> Reading and writing about family and friendship issues, self-awareness, and occupations. <i>Math:</i> Developing models to prioritize wants and needs, and class projects; tracking chores, classwork, developmental changes, skills, and abilities; recording votes and decision-making processes. <i>Social Studies:</i> Exploring majority rule and rights through family, class, and community decision-making; examining community products and occupations and how we make purchases (trade and bartering); identifying local landforms that affect community resources, recreation, and occupations. <i>Science:</i> Identifying and classifying community landforms' physical properties; classifying objects and tools produced by the community or used in various occupations; examining how force and motion affects home life, recreation, and occupations; examining and predicting life cycles, observing and recording changes in themselves and in their community.
Step 4: If there are few or limited areas of overlap, then repeat Steps 1 and 2 to broaden the possibilities.	Use as needed to create a better fit for students, their transition/lifelong needs, and academic priorities.
Step 5: Use convergent thinking to evaluate the overlapped and compatible ideas to narrow and refine, based on student needs and to support effective instruction.	Evaluate or refine to integrate with related services or to implement as a collaboratively planned teaching unit with general educators and/or other special educators.



displaying, and simple mathematical models or measuring change. Students can combine this with reading for information, developing questions for a survey, and then organizing/adding/displaying the results. Transition-focused topics could include surveys of skills and abilities, chores and responsibilities, use of community resources or recreation, occupations and their tools, or personal work preferences. Classifying and describing tools would address a science activity, and classifying landforms in the community would include a social studies standard. This shows how a real-world focus can serve as an integrating factor across multiple standards, allowing us to develop higher-order concepts and relationships in our students and to utilize research-based instructional practices (IES, 1999, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

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enthusiasm and engagement.

Conclusion

If you are looking for ways to give “life” to your standards-based instruction, to add authenticity and lifelong relevance and thereby engage and motivate your students, to address their real needs, then *add transition!* Don't let standards-based instruction sink your own or your students' enthusiasm and engagement—don't give in to “benchmark boredom!” Incorporate transition-focused “real-life” needs with authentic problem-solving

decision-making skills, and related occupational interests and abilities.

These transition competencies can be combined with academic skills in a number of ways. Reading and writing skills are very flexible and can be

applied to all of these areas through nonfiction and fiction essays, reports, and stories. Several sets of academic standards also can be combined together to address transition needs. Mathematical standards for second grade focus on addition/subtraction, organizing and

and critical thinking. By the way, this will also add research-based instructional practices of *problem-based learning* (IES, 1999, 2003; Valverde & Schmidt, 1997–1998) with those of *motivation and engagement* (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2005; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2002) to help ensure that your standards-based instruction hits the accountability high mark. Be sure to include other educators and school professionals in your planning. They also may be struggling to make standards-based instruction effective and engaging!

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